
RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Comparative Approach of the Portrayal of the Cultural Identity in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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ABSTRACT

The present work aims to compare in detail the depiction of cultural identity in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. What is particularly revealing is the different devices these writers use to portray aspects of cultural identity, combining autobiographical material with fiction. In other words, this analysis shines light on the different elements they utilize in defining their identities. In this respect, the success of this analysis requires the use of sociological, historical, psychological, and linguistic approaches. Both authors portray their cultural identities convincingly in their works. On the one hand, Morrison searches his identity for its construction. On the other hand, Achebe, as a representative, presents his identity as a response to Westerners' false portrayals of Africa, particularly the notion of having no language or culture. The analysis shows that they resort in comparable ways to oral tradition, regarding ancestors as a source of cultural identity, as well as superstitions. It also shows that their use of proverbs in the context of oral tradition is a remarkable fact distinguishing them. Achebe uses them to show the mastery of his language with its existence contrarily to Morrison. Additionally, Pilate in *Song of Solomon* and Agbala in *Things Fall Apart* play the same multifarious roles in the matter of cultural identity.

Résumé:

Ce présent travail vise à comparer en examinant la description de la question de l'identité culturelle constatée dans *Song of Solomon* de Toni Morrison et dans *Things Fall Apart* de Chinua Achebe. Mais, le problème est de voir les différents éléments utilisés par les deux pour décrire les aspects de l'identité culturelle dans leurs romans. En d'autres termes, l'intérêt scientifique de cette analyse se base sur les différents éléments dont ils font recours pour accomplir et définir leurs identités. En conséquence, pour la question de l'identité, Morrison, d'un côté comme un rappel, cherche son identité pour sa construction. Achebe, d'un autre côté comme représentant, présente son identité vivante pour répondre aux fausses descriptions de l'image de l'Afrique par des Occidentaux n'ayant pas de culture propre. L'examen de cette analyse résulte qu'ils font recours comparativement à la tradition orale, aux ancêtres, à la superstition et aux noms. Il résulte aussi que l'emploi des proverbes par Achebe comme l'un des éléments de la tradition orale est un fait remarquable le distinguant à Morrison qui montre aussi clairement sa césure avec les noms et l'héritage de l'Afrique.

KEYWORDS

Portrayal, cultural identity, oral tradition, construction, response, existence.

Description, identité, tradition orale, ancêtres, superstition, noms.

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1. Introduction

The question of cultural identity in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* is centered on the search for cultural identity. The reason is that the identity crisis is caused by slavery. Africans, as ancestors from Africa to America, give place to African-Americans as a new

generation has lost their cultural identity. Engaged in its construction, Morrison, as a recaller, resorts to the use of some devices referring to the oral tradition. Comparatively, the same style is remarkable through Chinua Achebe's presentation of his cultural identity in his novel *Things Fall Apart*. However, Achebe's portrayal of his cultural identity can be seen as an answer to the Westerners' negative image of Africa with no culture and no social cohesion. In this respect, Achebe's answer is formulated by presenting the Ibo village with its socio-traditional organization before the colonizer's arrival. In *Song of Solomon*, slavery is the cause of the identity crisis; in *Things Fall Apart*, however, the colonizer's arrival is the main cause.

The question of cultural identity has been highly and in scrutiny regarded by Kanga Jean Roger in his work: "The Search for Identity in Toni Morrison's Works. 2014". It results that Kanga has put emphasis on community and cultural identity, the search for American roots, African legacy and the impact of names on cultural identity. Bokotiabato Mokogna Zéphirin tackles the same subject matter in studying "Insight into the Ibo Socio-Traditional Organization in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, and *Things Fall Apart*. 2019." In reading them, the Ibo cultural identity can be noticed in the Ibo vision of the world, economic activities, the village as a totemic entity, an ideological entity, and a religious entity. However, scientifically and for the present article, both studies lead us to work on "A Comparative Approach of the Portrayal of the Cultural Identity in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*." But, the matter lies on the different devices they use to portray the aspects of cultural identity, in combining the true histories of their ancestors with their fictitious works. It seems that they resort to indigenous tradition for their achievements in defining their identities. In this regard, the present article is going to cast light on: oral tradition, ancestors, superstition and names. Thus, the success of this analysis requires the use of sociological, historical, psychological, and linguistical approaches.

1.1 Oral Tradition

As for the oral tradition in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, some songs, stories, superstitions, and myths play a very undeniable role. They are used to highlight Milkman, the protagonist of Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, to discover his family's history and, secondly, to construct his cultural identity. It also comes out that Pilate, who is Milkman's aunt, possesses oral tradition skills. They also help Milkman to discover his forbears at Shalimar. Kanga Jean-Roger (2014:34) writes: "In fact, Pilate is considered as the "pioneer" of oral tradition through the song she sings every evening with Agar, her daughter. That song paves the way to Milkman to discover his forbears at Shalimar". The remarkable fact through the above quotation is that songs play a very important role in any society. They also have various functions and meanings. They can play the role of warning, evocating and announcing, as can be observed in this:

O Sugarman done fly away
Sugarman done gone
Sugarman cut across the sky
Sugarman gone home ...
(Song of Solomon 6)

Through the song, readers can understand the role played by it in the quotation mentioned above. It stands for preventing the attempt to fly and go away, which are synonyms for death or everlasting departure. Anyway, Toni Morrison succeeds in combining "cut" with "across" and "the sky" to present or to mean the act of suicide. In fact, this song is performed to warn Robert Smith, the agent of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance. He plans to perform something awful that is to fly from Mercy to the other side of Lake Superior by his own wings:

The North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance agent promised to fly from Mercy to the other side of Lake Superior at three o'clock. Two days before the event was to take place, he tacked a note on the door of his little yellow house:

At 3: 00 p.m. on Wednesday the 18th of February,
1931, I will take off from Mercy and fly away on
my own wings. Please forgive me. I loved you all.
(signed) Robert Smith,
Ins. agent
(Song of Solomon 3)

In the oral tradition, songs are highly considered and have an important place. Myths and stories do not make an exception. Just after Mr. Smith's death, Milkman Dead is born the next day in Mercy Hospital, marked by Mr. Smith's blue silk wings as it is told:

The next day, a color baby was born inside Mercy for the first time. Mr. Smith's silk wings must have left their mark, because when the little boy discovered, at four, the same thing Mr. Smith had learned earlier—that only birds and airplanes could fly—he lost all interest in himself. To have to live...(Song of Solomon 9)

Songs are crucial sources of information. They contain some ancestors' famous names as well as the marvelous performances of their times. The same performances had effects on societies and still continue to have effects in the present day, thanks to songs. This case is noticeable in most African societies. Songs are mainly composed of the names of some brave people, including their different mysticisms. In this connection, Kanga writes: "The same melodies are listened to in the song Milkman discovers his grandfather and his great grandfather, respectively Jake and Salomon(...) during his journey at Shalimar (...) the flying African children" (Kanga Jean Roger 35). In addition to that, Toni Morrison writes the song:

Jake the only son of Solomon
come booba yalle, come booba tambee
whirled about and touched the sun
come konka yalle, come konka tambee. (Morrison Toni 303)

The song bears words which reveal important names for Milkman. It tells clearly that Jake is the only son of Solomon. Moreover, in the sentence "whirled about and touched the sun", Morrison combines "touched" in the past tense with "the sun" to help readers and Milkman know and understand how the flying African son, Solomon. This is of great importance for Milkman's search for his family's past. As readers can notice, thanks to the oral tradition, Milkman is informed about his ancestors' roots. This information can help him construct and define his cultural identity as an African-American. It is only thanks to oral tradition that Milkman is aware of his family's roots, as Kanga Jean Roger points it out: "Otherwise, oral tradition in Song of Solomon is expressed by storytelling. During (...), many people enlighten him thanks to storytelling. Among them, we quote Pilate, Reverend Cooper, Circe, and Vernell" (Kanga Jean Roger 36). In this connection, Kanga Jean Roger once more writes Pilate's explanations of her father's death to Milkman in the following way: "Our papa was dead, you see. They blew him five feet up into the air. He was sitting and blew him five feet into the air" (Kanga Jean Roger 36).

Anyway, it is well known that Achebe is the fruit of a double experience. One from his African roots and another from his Western culture. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe does not deny his Ibo culture. He also resorts to its oral tradition to defend his cultural identity against Westerners' false accusations. This section does not cast light only on what stories, proverbs and songs are but also tries to show how they serve in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

In this respect, stories, proverbs and songs, among other devices of the oral tradition, are illustrative for this study. In *Song of Solomon*, Toni Morrison uses songs to help Milkman, the protagonist, discover his family's history. Thanks to songs, Milkman knows how powerful his grandfather was. Songs also reveal Milkman's relatives' names. Comparatively, the same style is also observable in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*:

'Who will wrestle for our village?
Okafo will wrestle for our village.
Has he thrown a hundred men?
He has thrown four hundred men.
Has he thrown a hundred cats?
He has thrown four hundred cats.
Then send him word to fight for us. (Achebe Chinua 36)

This song betrays the masculine story of violence. The song can also be considered a story in the sense that it tells how strong Okafo is. It shows that Okafo is a strong man, a wrestler accepted by the village. The repeated "Has thrown" and "four hundred" combined with "men" and then "cats", in the affirmative form, reveals and insists on the number of men and cats or victories he has already won for his village. This song is sung for his praise. Achebe repeats "a hundred" combined with "men" and then "cat" in the interrogative form so as to precise Okafo's experience of wrestling. Both tenses give the place to a special rhythm and melody of the song. A song can also be considered as part of beliefs as Achebe presents it:

Eze elina, elina!
Sala

Eze ilikwa ya
Ikwala akwa olgholi
Ebe Danda nechi eze
Ebe Uzuzu nele egwu
Sala. (Achebe Chinua 42)

As an Ibo child, Achebe comments: "He sang it in his mind and walked to its beat. If the song ended on his right foot, his mother was alive. If it ended on his left, she was dead. No, not dead, but ill. It ended on the right. She was alive and well" (Achebe Chinua 42). Achebe also resorts to stories as one of the devices of the oral tradition to defend his cultural identity:

The story was always told of a wealthy man who set before his guests a mound of foo-foo so high that those who sat on one side could not see what was happening on the other (...). It was only then that they exchanged greetings and shook hands over what was left of food. The New Yam Festival was thus an occasion for joy throughout Umuofia. And every man whose arm was strong, as the Ibo people say, was expected to invite large numbers of guests from far and wide. Okonkwo always asked his wives' relations, and since he now had three wives his guests would make a fairly big crowd. (Achebe Chinua 26-27)

As one can notice, the story is about a wealthy man and many guests at the moment of the New Yam Festival. Only strong men can have a big crowd with them in their compounds. This can be alluded to Okonkwo, who is rich with farms and wives as portrayed by Achebe: "Okonkwo's prosperity was visible in his household. He had a large compound...". In this consideration, a huge quantity of food can be cooked by a wealthy man's wives. The fact is that, in the story, Achebe portrays how the village, Umuofia, is in joy during the moment of the celebration of the New Yam Festival. Okonkwo as a strong man, can invite people from far and wide sides of Umuofia: "During the planting season Okonkwo worked daily on his farms from cock crow until the chickens went to roost. He was a very strong man and rarely felt fatigued" (Achebe Chinua 10). It is revealed that people at that moment of the New Yam Festival exchange greetings and shake hands. Also, they give thanks to Ani, the earth goddess and source of fertility, as Achebe (1958:26) writes: "The Feast of the New Yam was approaching, and Umuofia was in a festival mood. It was an occasion for giving thanks Ani, the earth goddess and source of all fertility". By the same token, the story of vegetables becoming smaller after cooking is of great illustration for the oral tradition:

'There is too much green vegetables', she said.
'Don't you see the pot is full of yams?' Ekwefi asked. And you
Know how leaves become smaller after cooking'.
'Yes', said Ezinma, 'that was why the snake-lizard killed his mother'.
'Very true', said Ekwefi.
'He gave his mother seven baskets of vegetables to cook, and in the end
There were only three. And so he killed her', said Ezinma.
'That is not the end of the story'. (Achebe Chinua 59).

In fact, in the Ibo society, proverbs, as one of the devices of the oral tradition, are highly considered as the art of conversation. A close investigation of this study reveals that Achebe uses proverbs in all his novels with the art of a traditional conversationalist. In this regard, the following extract confirms our assertion: "Among the Ibo, the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten (Achebe Chinua iv). This sentence is a key and compliment to Achebe's skill as a novelist. In all his novels, he uses proverbs with the art of a traditional conversationalist. 'A proverb not only makes a point, it fixes it in our minds. Sometimes it seems a pity that Achebe has, of necessity, to explain his proverbs' (Achebe Chinua x).

This shows that proverbs should be taken into account when a researcher intends to investigate on Achebe's works. In connection with that, Eustace Palmer adds: "No study of Achebe's works would be complete without mention of the use of proverbs which is such a distinctive of his style" (Palmer Eustace 61). This leads readers to ask some questions like:

- How is defined the word proverb?
- What are the functions of proverbs?
- What are Achebe's motives for the use of proverbs in his *Things Fall Apart*?

Defining a proverb is not an easy task, as it depends on the context in which people are found. However, the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary 5th edition*, defines a proverb as "a pointed statement alleging the truth". It is noteworthy to say that proverbs have

diverse functions. They express intellectual and emotional attitudes: disappointment, sympathy, intention, and acceptance, as well as moral attitudes: approval, disapproval, appreciation, apology or regret. Proverbs and speech acts have the socializing function and suasion. They are used to congratulate, attract attention, give advice, offer, suggest, request or warn. Moreover, proverbs had and still have a didactic function. The exploration of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* reveals the author's affection for the use of African tradition using proverbs. He resorts to proverbs for personal interaction among the others:

To crown it all, he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars. And so although Okonkwo was still young, he was already one of the greatest men of his time. Age was respected among his people, but achievement was revered. As the elders said, 'if a child washed his hands he could eat with kings. (Achebe Chinua 6).

The use of a proverb can be seen in the sentence: "If a child washed his hands, he could eat with kings". This is very meaningful in the sense that Okonkwo is still young but is already one of the greatest men of his time. And thanks to his achievement, he can sit and eat with kings. In fact, in the Ibo tradition, a man is judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father. Okonkwo's father died without any title and was heavily in debt. This proverb shows that Okonkwo, different from his father, has won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He is a wealthy farmer and has two barns full of yams. He has his third wife and can sit and eat with kings. Again, for the same purpose, Achebe uses a proverb in this:

The men then continued their drinking and talking. Ogbuefi Idigo was talking about the palm-wine tapper, Obiako, who suddenly gave up his trade. 'There must be something behind it', he said, wiping the foam of the wine from his moustache with the back of his left hand. There must be a reason for it. A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing. (Achebe Chinua 15).

Readers can notice the use proverb in the sentence: 'A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing' with its warning function. The use of toad foretells a coming event or situation with sorrowful or harmful consequences.

Thus, as we said earlier, Achebe refers to proverbs in all his novels; for example, in *No Longer at Ease*, the author uses proverbs for many purposes. One of them is to teach people perfect behaviour if you intend to be great. Put differently, if you pay respect to the great, you pave the way to your own greatness. It is such an idea that Achebe sums up: "If you pay homage to the man on top, others will pay homage to you when it is your time to be on top" (Achebe Chinua 26). In this way, Achebe advises or tells people how to behave and how not to behave.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, an old man and member of the Abazon delegation uses the following saying: "If you cross the Great River to marry a wife, you must be ready for the risk of night journey by canoe . . ." (Achebe Chinua 127). This is a warning proverb telling the people of Abazon to get ready to face Sam's anger as they said 'no' to the Referendum from which he wanted to be elected president-for-life. Once more, this proverb warns people about the aftermaths that may result after acting. It is going without saying that in African communities, proverbs are regarded as gifts left by ancestors.

2. Ancestors

The resort to ancestors is visible and permanent in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. They are guardians of the family's roots. Ancestors stand for a guide related to the history of the society beyond the one of the family. In this respect, Toni Morrison, quoted by Kanga JeanRoger, opines that the absence of ancestors is destruction. It was the absence of ancestors that frightening, that was threatening, and it caused huge destruction and disarray in the work itself." In the same way, Kanga writes:

The relevant reason is the fact that they display knowledge and wisdom from one generation to another. In *Song of Solomon*, Pilate is the ancestor. She serves as "pilot" to Milkman when he is in the quest of his family's roots. Pilate is the first person who tells Milkman the history of his parents and grandparents. (Kanga Jean Roger 37-38)

Morrison attributes ancestors' qualities to Solomon in this novel. He is seen as an ancestor who begets with that; the conversation between Sing and Milkman tells more:

"Why did you call Solomon a flying African?"

"Oh; that's just some old folks' lie they tell"

around here. Some of those Africans

they bought over here as slaves could fly.

A lot of them flew back to Africa. (Morrison Toni 323).

This conversation betrays the powerful quality of Solomon, the secret to fly. It also shows that some slaves bought from Africa could fly, and many went back to Africa by flying. Ancestors are people of great importance in society, as demonstrated in this novel by Morrison. He uses them so as to help Milkman discover his family's roots. Morrison succeeds in attributing ancestors' qualities to Pilate, Circe, Reverend Cooper, Vern, Susan Byrd, and Sing so as to play a prominent role in Milkman's reconstruction and definition of his family's history. Thanks to their ancestors, Milkman knows where actually his ancestors are from: "If you ever have a doubt we are from Africa, look at Pilate. She looked just like Papa, and he looked like all the pictures you ever see of Africans" (Morrison Toni 54). Macon Dead precises clearly to Milkman that they are all from Africa.

Like Toni Morrison in his *Song of Solomon*, Achebe also resorts to the use of ancestors in his *Things Fall Apart* for his answer. This is enlightened through traditionalist characters such as: "Agbala" the Oracle, representing the ancestors of the Ibo people. He is the spirits of their departed fathers. The Oracle is also one of the traditional practices undergone by the Ibo people. He is consulted to know about the future when misfortune dogged their steps or when they have disputes with their neighbours. People come from far and near to consult ancestors through the Oracle:

There was no barn to inherit. The story was told in Umuofia of how his father, Unoka, had gone to consult the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves to find out why he always had a miserable harvest. The Oracle was called Agbala, and people come from far and near to consult it. They came when misfortune dogged their steps or when they had disputes with neighbours. (Achebe Chinua 12).

The remarkable fact is that the Oracle, Agbala, is represented by his priestess as a physical intermediary. A priest is a powerful person and is also feared for possessing the power of his god: "Many years ago when Okonkwo was still a boy, his father, Unoka, had gone to consult Agbala. The priestess in those days was a woman called Chika. She was full of the power of her god, and she was greatly feared. Unoka stood before her and began his story" (Achebe Chinua 12).

Agbala, the Oracle, is represented in this time by a woman, a priestess called Chika. She is full of the power of her god. And it is revealed that people greatly fear her. Apart from Chika, there is also Chielo, the priestess of Agbala: "Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, called the converts the excrement of the clan, and the new faith a mad dog that had come to eat it up" (Achebe Chinua 101). Achebe attributes ancestors' qualities again to Afa Oracle: After the death of Ekwefi's second child, Okonkwo had gone to a medicine man, who was also a diviner of the Afa Oracle, to inquire what was amiss. Also, Okagbue Uyanwa is among the people who have the power of their gods and are also greatly feared by the clan:

Okonkwo had called in another medicine –man who was famous in the clan for his great knowledge about "Ogbanje children". His name was Okagbue Uyanwa. Okagbue was a very striking figure, tall, with a full beard and a bald head. He was light in complexion and his eyes were red and fiery. He always gnashed his teeth as he listened to those who came to consult him (Achebe Chinua 55).

This shows that the presence of ancestors is prominent in African societies. They have the power to heal people and save lives. Beyond all, they protect, guide and instruct people by providing them with wisdom. They also keep the past alive and are considered in this way as the cultural foundation within different African communities. This is made possible thanks to superstition.

3. Superstition

Toni Morrison amazingly, significantly, and particularly uses superstition in his novel. It opens chapter one of *Song of Solomon* with the flight by wings. This is noticed in Robert Smith's belief in his power to fly with his own wings. As I said in one of the preceding sections, Robert Smith is an agent of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company. Here is his promissal quoted by Toni Morrison as follows: "... I will take off from Mercy and fly away on my own wings. Please forgive me. I love you all. (signed) Robert Smith. Ins. agent" (Morrison Toni 3). In the same way, superstition is added through Milkman Dead, born the next day in Mercy Hospital. He is the first color baby to be born in that Hospital. His birth is marked by Mr. Smith's blue silk wings. Milkman, in his turn, also believes in his grandfather's power of flying: "He could fly! You hear me? My great-granddaddy could fly! Goddamn! (...) up again. Still pounding, leaping, diving". The son of a bitch could fly! He didn't need an aeroplane. Didn't need any fuckin tee double, you say. He could fly his own self". Milkman is proud of his grandfather's power to fly. Morrison portrays the existence of the natural and supernatural worlds. Again, superstition recurs in the way Pilate is born:

After their mother died, she had come struggling out of the womb without help from throbbing muscles or the pressure of swift womb water. As a result, for all the years he knew her, her stomach was as smooth and sturdy as her back, at no place interrupted by a navel. It was the absence of a navel that convinced people that she had not come into this world through normal; had never lain. (Morrison Toni .27-28).

The remarkable fact is that Morrison puts emphasis on the mysterious circumstances under which Pilate was born. He emphasizes on her body, which is also considered as a mysterious one. Toni Morrison goes beyond by portraying Pilate's mysterious life as a healer and foreseer or teller of the future:

She was a natural healer, and among quarreling drunks and fighting women, she could hold her own and sometimes mediated a peace that lasted a good bit longer than it should have because it was administered by someone not like them. But most important, she paid close attention to her mentor-the father who appeared before her sometimes and told her things. (Morrison Toni 150).

Superstition in *Things Fall Apart*, as a result, is noticeable in what Ibo people believe in. For example, Achebe resorts to Ogbanje, the belief in wicked children, to portray superstition:

This man told him that the child was an Ogbanje, one of those wicked children who, when they died, entered their mother's wombs to be born again. 'when your wife becomes pregnant again', he said, let her not sleep in her hut. Let her go and stay with her people. In that way she will elude her wicked tormentor and break its evil cycle of birth and death. (Achebe Chinua 54-55).

The planting of crops or the Week of Peace is also highly regarded by the Ibo people: "No work was done during the Week of Peace. People called on their neighbours and drank palm-wine. During this week, it would not be good for an Ibo-man to die as it is confirmed: 'It is indeed true', said Ogbuefi Ezendu.' They have that custom in Obodoani. If a man dies at this time, he is not buried but cast into the evil forest" (Achebe Chinua 23). This belief is an abomination for a man to die during the Week of Peace. There is a lack of understanding, and people only observe it. Furthermore, they are prompted to throw away those who die in the Week of Peace without burial. This custom gives a place full of the evil spirits of the unburial dead. They, in turn, become hungry to do harm to the living. In fact, the question of cultural identity is also observable through names.

4. Names

Prominent in this section is that names can define people and their different cultural identities. They can also tell stories and inform about spaces and periods of time. They can be considered symbols of cultural identity for a given community and for its people limited in a given period of time, too. In this consideration, Toni Morrison and Chinua Achebe resort to names so as to define their cultural identities.

In Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, the names of black people in the new continent are the result of the slavery trade from Africa to America. African people now in America, as slaves, lost their tribes and no longer had the right to give African names to their children when they were born. It is revealed that only masters give names of their choice to them, as Kanga states:

Indeed, one of the naming processes practiced in Morrison's novel stems from slavery period. At that time, even African slaves were prevented to use their original names. Also it was forbidden to children to inherit an African name. When a baby was born among slaves, the slave masters take the paternity to aware the name either from the Bible or the name of their choice. (Kanga Jean Roger 50)

On the same page, Kanga quotes from Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* to illustrate the conversation between Suzan Byrd and Milkman:

What was Jake's last name?
Can you tell me?
You tell me?
She (Suzan Byrd) shrugged. "I don't think he had one. He was one of those flying African children".

The remarkable fact in the quotation mentioned above is that Toni Morrison puts emphasis on one of the devices of his cultural identity not inherited from Africa. The tradition of naming is no longer the one from Africa but belonging to slave masters who are Americans. Most of the slave owners are Christians. Thus, they are aware of names either from the Bible or the names of their choice, as said in the above sentences. Jake and Solomon are inspirations of the Bible. Slaves, bought from Africa, lost their true identities through the lost of names of their different origins from Africa, the true land of their ancestors. Then, nicknames are given to them by their masters, as Kanga comments it:

Another aspect to raise which is undeniable in *Song of Solomon* is the use of nicknames. That use of nicknames jeopardizes Milkman, the protagonist, when he wants to search for his family's past and community. The protagonist's family name is Macon Dead III. Freddie the janitor gives him the nickname of Milkman because he is breast-fed by his mother until he is too old. (Kanga Jean Roger 51).

Slaves or black people do not acquire their own names from their ancestors in Africa. Names are given to them in a casual way. Since they are in a "New World", they also lost, besides their own names from Africa, their African tribes and roots or customs and traditions. Toni Morrison (1977:53) also underlines the lost of African cultural identity through the presence or use of nicknames or names from the Bible given to black people from Africa. Through Macon's explanations to Milkman, his son: "Papa couldn't read, couldn't even sign his name (...) He never read anything. I tried to teach him, but he couldn't remember those little marks from one day to the next. Wrote one word in his life-Pilate's name; copied it out of the Bible." Referring to names in *Things Fall Apart*, Epounda notices:

Only three first names and three nicknames are reported in *Things Fall Apart*, with 3.52 percent each, whereas official names count 91.76 percentages with 78 instances. The last category of names, known as institutional or titular names counts only one instance with 1.17 percentages. We may be tempted to say that the predominance of surnames shows the author's attachment to African cultural values. This witnesses the traditional ere which prevailed at that time since the culture of first names came with Europeans. (Eounda Mexan Serge 123)

In connection with the above-mentioned quotation, readers can notice that the exploration of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* for the present study reveals the existence of four types of names. Also, the predominance of certain names over others, mainly official names and first names, over nicknames and institutional ones. In fact, in Africa in general and in Igbo society in particular, names are highly regarded and are also meaningful. They are linked to some stories, circumstances, spaces and periods of time. So far, talking about names in the Igbo community, Dele Chinwe Iadejobi-Ukwu quoted, makes the following comment:

Igbo names are grammatical constructions; that is, they constitute a complete expression. Therefore, Igbo names must not only be meaningful they must reflect on certain circumstances and experiences of human sojourn on earth or border on the child's conception, birth, and societal expectations. Igbo names tell stories of happiness, joy, sorrow, death, travels, prospects, potentials, and even belief is the seemingly impossible. (Dele Chinwe qtd by Epounda Mexan Serge 126)

Most African names are meaningful, and an individual can have more than one name. In Africa, in general, certain names refer to myths, superstitions, customs, traditions, and cultures belonging to different communities. In this regard, Chinua Achebe shows the mastery of his cultural identity by using different Igbo names with their meanings so as to defend his ancestors' values:

"Chi", meaning personal god. "Egwugwu", a masquerader who impersonates one of the ancestral spirits of the village. "Nso-ani", a religious offense of a kind abhorred by everyone. "Obi", the large living quarters of the head of the family. "Ogbanje", a changeling: a child who repeatedly dies and returns to its mother to be reborn. "Osu", outcast; having been dedicated to a god, the Osu was taboo, and was not allowed to mix with the freeborn in anyway. (Achebe Chinua 158)

Names noticed in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* have important impacts on African American culture on the one hand and on the Ibo's culture on the other hand. The remarkable fact in their use of names is that Morrison resorts to them so as to portray the history of the "Black Community" of America, including their culture and identity after being disconnected from their African roots. Whereas Achebe presents his Ibo- names as a response to Westerners' ignorance of African culture.

5. Conclusion

The present article has been devoted to analysing comparatively the portrayal of cultural identity in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The matter has been raised on the different devices they use to portray the aspects of cultural identity, in combining the true histories of their ancestors with their fictitious works. In other terms, the scientific interest of this analysis has been to cast light on the different elements they utilize to successfully define their identities. The success of this analysis has also been through the examination of the oral tradition, ancestors, superstition and names. In this respect, the sociological, historical, psychological, and linguistic approaches have been of great help to this analysis. Resultingly and convincingly, both authors portray their cultural identities in their works. On the one hand, Morrison, as a reminder, searches his

identity for its construction. On the other hand, Achebe, as a representative, presents his identity alive as a response to Westerners' false description of the image of Africa as having no culture. In the scrutiny of this analysis, it comes out that they resort comparatively to oral tradition ancestors as a source of cultural identity, superstitions and names.

As for the oral tradition, some songs, stories and myths play a very undeniable role. For example, they are used to highlight Milkman, the protagonist of Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, to discover his family's history and, secondly, to construct his cultural identity. It also comes out that Pilate, who is Milkman's aunt, is imbued with oral tradition skills. They also pave the way for Milkman to discover his forbears at Shalimar. Toni Morrison amazingly, significantly, and particularly uses superstition in his novel. This has been noticed in Robert Smith's belief in his power to fly with his own wings. Additionally, superstition is seen through Pilate, who was born in mysterious circumstances. Her body is also mysterious; she communicates with dead people. It is the case of her dead father who tells her what she should do or not for healing practices. Superstitions in *Things Fall Apart*, as a result, are noticeable in what Ibo people believe in. For example, for them, the nighttime is a moment that the evil spirits come out. Ibo people believe in "Ogbanje", representing wicked children. There is also a superstition related to the planting of crops such as yams in a period called the "Week of Peace". It is believed that everyone should be at peace with everyone.

It also shows that the use of proverbs as one of the oral tradition devices is a remarkable fact distinguishing these authors. Achebe uses them to show the mastery of his language with its existence, contrarily to Morrison, who shows caesura with names and inheritance from Africa. Additionally, Pilate in *Song of Solomon* and Agbala in *Things Fall Apart* play the same and multifarious roles in the matter of cultural identity.

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